

HELPING LOCATE VETERANS:

JOINT DOD-VA CHEMICAL/BIOLOGICAL EXPOSURE SYSTEM

By: Peter Graves, FHP&R Staff Writer

Throughout the history of warfare, nation-states have sometimes been forced to take drastic measures to counter serious threats from real or potential enemies. At the time these measures were undertaken the purposes were quite legitimate, even if the means were considered extreme. This can be said of Department of Defense (DoD) authorized chemical and biological countermeasure tests, decades-long experiments which investigated the effects of certain chemical and biological compounds on Service volunteers and the utility of protective equipment and procedures. These tests were not intended to harm but to aid in protecting Service members and military assets from enemy attacks with chemical or biological agents.

Beginning in World War II and extending through the early part of the Cold War, DoD oversaw a series of land and sea based experiments designed to test human and equipment reaction to chemical and biological warfare ingredients. DoD officials feared either the Axis powers or later the communist Eastern Bloc might attempt to use such materials as a weapon against American and other allied forces. A majority of these tests were carried out at locations such as the Dugway Proving Ground in Utah and the Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland. In many of these cases, the research was designed to test the effectiveness of countermeasures (i.e. protective equipment) against chemical and biological variants with the potential to be weaponized. Similar tests were conducted on a variety of U.S. Navy ships as well during the Project 112 Shipboard

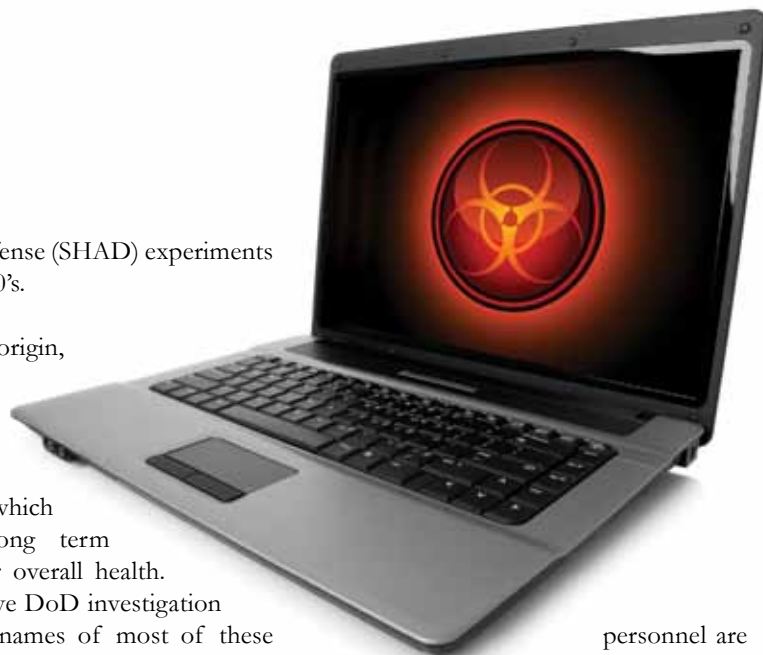
Hazard and Defense (SHAD) experiments in the early 1960's.

Regardless of origin, thousands of volunteer participants were exposed to materials which might have long term effects on their overall health.

A comprehensive DoD investigation uncovered the names of most of these individuals. DoD has been working jointly with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in an effort to locate and inform the participants of health benefits to which they may be entitled.

In an effort to ease this process, DoD and VA unveiled a joint Chemical/Biological Warfare Exposure System - a secure, searchable Web page designed to give VA regional officers quick and simple access to information for known participants in these tests. The Web application displays information relating to DoD and VA records for military personnel. It also provides the departments with a central repository for handling the flow of content and reporting of these data. With the few simple clicks of a mouse, VA officials can readily begin the process of notifying test participants, helping avoid unnecessary delays.

Data is not all inclusive and both agencies continue their efforts to locate more participants in DoD chemical or biological tests. Such efforts will be ongoing through Federal fiscal year 2011. Once new



personnel are identified they will be added to the master database. Thus, a veteran who does not appear in the archives presently does not necessarily lack an exposure history. As more records are reviewed or located, new information is added to the database.

The DoD/ VA Chemical/ Biological Exposure System represents an important step in ensuring Veterans who volunteered for these tests receive the care and benefits they so richly deserve. These individuals "stood on the front lines" of science in preparation for a battle against some of the more heinous weapons ever devised. The debt they are owed is immeasurable. For more information on the history of DoD Chemical and Biological tests please visit <http://fhbp.osd.mil/CBexposures>.